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Summitting it all up: Contact a Russian

CAPITAL SKETCH

By S.J. Masty

Dipping gingerly into the columnar mailbag, we find a letter on White House stationery.

"Dear Capital Sketch," it begins, "everyone keeps talking about this upcoming summit, but what can I do — I mean me personally — to prepare for this momentous historical event? [signed] Your buddy, Ron."

Perhaps one ought to explain

that the letterhead is from the White House Grill in Mollusk, Va., where Ron Finchmeyer is wine steward and dishwasher. Nonetheless, it's an interesting question because there is plenty we can do to ensure a successful summit.

As we keep hearing on the high-brow shows like "Agronsky and Company," "Nightline," "Entertainment Tonight" and "Bowling for Dollars," the key to a happy summit is real communication, with both sides being as open and selfless as, say, Alan Alda, Richard Cohen or that nice Mr. Gorbachev from Time magazine.

Usually, they explain, the Russians feel paranoid. Even though our negotiating teams are nice as pie, the Russians suspect that once we leave the room we start laughing at their ugly women, their national food, sawdust, or their jovial hobbies such as enslaving their neighbors.

One way to discourage paranoia is by writing the Russians and convincing them that we're not all crouching in front of our capitalist Betamaxes, watching "Rambo" and filing our teeth.

Go ahead, pick up your pen and write a Russian at random. Pick a first name like Ivan and write it on

an envelope addressed to the Soviet Embassy on 16th Street. Inside, put a little message like, "don't worry, you have friends." Don't bother signing it — they don't know you anyway.

Out of hundreds of Soviets in Washington, there has to be one named Ivan, and he'll know he has friends. So will the KGB bureau chief who reads his mail.

It's also a good idea to keep in touch by phone, although you can do it without making a special call.

Specialists in espionage tell us that the Russians use surveillance equipment to monitor telephone calls sent from Washington over microwaves. Their computers are allegedly triggered to tape messages containing words like KGB, CIA, Afghanistan, heroin, cocaine, or Mary McGrory — things that identify you as a news source, a potential blackmail victim, or a pinko.

Of course, this is just Pentagon paranoia. The real reason the Russians tape phone calls is that they're lonesome because nobody gives them a neighborly ring, even on important dates like Lenin's birthday or the anniversary of torturing the first Jewish dissident.

A friendly thing to do is let them in on your phone calls. If you're ringing Mom back home in Michigan, start your call by asking "did you get the heroin shipment from Afghanistan," or "here at the CIA we never read Mary McGrory." Then talk about Aunt Maude's foot operation or how Uncle Horace disgraced himself at his birthday party.

There's nothing a homesick KGB agent likes more than to listen to tapes of family chitchat and grandma's coleslaw recipe. However, it might help to explain this to Mom beforehand, lest she assume you've taken up drug trafficking or cloak and dagger work.

Of course, this is just the bare minimum. If you really want the summit to be a success and you really want the Russians to know

we're loving and caring, you could contact them in their own country.

Either get a Moscow phone directory from your library or make up an address, like: "Occupantsky, No. 12 Trotsky Circle, Gorki, USSR." Send a foldout from Playboy magazine, with a note saying, "This is how American girls look. What do Russian girls look like?"

Even if you don't get an answer, you'll have done your bit for international peace and understanding.